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ABSTRACT

Effective individualized reading programs can mean the difference between success and failure for children with reading problems. There are five areas to be considered in the implementation of such a program: (1) diagnosis or needs assessment; (2) flexible grouping, based on either achievement, special needs, interest, social background, or a peer tutoring relationship; (3) material selection; (4) a balance of teaching methods; and (5) a personalized reading approach that involves an abundance of books in the classrom, student/teacher conferences, and development of a student's incentive to improve his or her skills. (FL)

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DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING AN INDIVIDUALIZED READING PROGRAM

If you are using someone's dated, outmoded, or passé reading program why not create your own neoteric approach?

As large numbers of students experiencing difficulty learning to read continue (Harris and Smith, 1976), with many students failing courses in content areas because of inadequate reading achievement (Robinson, 1975), and because of high percentages of gifted students dropping out of school resulting from unmet needs (Lyon, 1976), educators are becoming more aware of the urgent need for improvement of reading instruction. An analysis of school reading problems concludes that the most obvious dilemma is the discovery of the variety of unique learning problems found among children. Even more obvious is the fact that these problems elude the single answer. Children differ, learning problems differ, and, therefore, reading instruction (planned for specific inidivdual needs) must differ.

Methods of meeting individual needs in reading may lie in an individualized approach. Implementing an individualized reading approach involves five major areas: diagnosis (all kinds), grouping, materials, test selection, readability, balance and methodology/approaches, and personalized reading approach.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis and/or needs assessment remains the ideal way to begin individualizing reading. After identifying problems and needs, instructional strategies can be planned to meet exact needs of students. Assessment evidence is viewed with the idea that students should not be assigned

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to master skills already acquired, or ones they are not yet ready to learn. Individual conferences with the teacher and use of various diagnostic tests are useful in determining children's reading needs. If given an opportunity, children are often very capable of selecting their own appropriate reading levels (Barbe and Abbott, 1975).

Skillful teachers are integral, specific rather than variable, in diagnostic procedures. Teachers evaluate progress, determine objectives, plan recycling when mastery is not achieved, and prescribe new objectives when a task is mastered. Four critical areas aware teachers observe and evaluate during diagnostic procedures are:

Visual disability - defective vision, lack of visual acuity, narrow perceptual span, regressions, faulty eye movements, reversals.

Inadequate vocabulary - low stock of sight words, difficulty in word recognition, failure to use context clues, difficulty in word recognition, inability to use word analysis.

Slow rate of reading - unsatisfactory silent reading rate, ineffective oral reading, word-by-word reading, lip movement and inner vocabulary.

Comprehension - concentration, retention, lack of visualization.

Oral reading inventories, graded reading passages that students read orally to determine instructional and frustration reading levels, are useful diagnostic tools. A teacher may design assessment by selecting passages from books that will actually be used during the semester. Students would read passages or short stories aloud in small groups and discuss comprehension of material by answering questions, either from the book or asked by the teacher. The teacher would make notes of

problems observed and of special interests shown by students.

Below are two samples of oral reading selections and discussion questions. Teachers can construct oral reading pre-tests from texts of any course, using these guidelines:

1. Choose a selection of a length and level that will be possible to read and discuss by all members of a small group within the period.
2. Choose a story that should be of interest to the group so they are motivated to participate; the plot, the characters, and the setting should present action and imagery to attract the readers' attention.
3. Design follow-up questions which inquire about important details about characters and settings, central themes (or messages) of stories, and meanings of vocabulary words, and/or inferences that can be made about characters and events. When appropriate, questions could also include: possible meanings of titles, backgrounds of authors and influences in stories, points of view, imagery, foreshadowing or flashback devices, irony, satire, symbolism, and tone.

In addition to the above observational techniques there are a number of other diagnostic procedures useful to teachers: informal reading inventories (IRI), commercially developed tests (Slosson, Sucher and Allred, Lillie Pope, and many others), Dolch sight word lists, and Ginn Word Recognition Test. These procedures and materials, along with observation should enable teachers to adequately diagnose reading needs of students.

The following checklist was developed by reading teachers and may be used by all teachers when determining needs of students:

Yes	No	BASIC TEACHING COMPETENCIES IN READING
		1. Knowledge of reading skills and reading instruction concepts.
		2. Content or subject matter strategies for dealing with word recognition skills, either whole class or individual work.
		3. Know and be able to use structural and phonetic analysis approaches to word recognition skills.
		4. Develop word attack and vocabulary skill sheets.
		5. Develop comprehension skills; structured overviews, reading (reasoning) guides, study guides, reaction guides.
		6. Develop and administer informal reading inventories.
		7. Identify and utilize the three levels of comprehension: recall, interpretation, and application to analyze content, questions, and teaching strategies.
		8. Provide for study skills of time management, notetaking, memory and organization, taking examinations, and reading rates and adjustments of rate relative to purposes for reading.
		9. Know and utilize the elements of "directed reading-thinking activities": readiness (to read), vocabulary, purpose, reading, and follow-up activity.
		10. Significance of "cloze" techniques.
		11. Do readability and book evaluations.

Grouping

A worthwhile method of meeting individual needs in most classrooms is grouping. At times children's needs are met most effectively in group situations. Groups should be formed always as an outgrowth of needs arising as a result of individual conferences. Groups, as well as teachers, should remain flexible throughout the year. After conducting a number of individual conferences, teachers will determine that several children are ready to work on a common skill, thus naturally indicating a group for purposes of developing specific skills. Group activities are usually of short duration because, after further conferences, some children normally will need more practice and/or drill while others will be ready for a new or different task. Group activities will ordinarily be concentrated on a single purpose, formed around common interests, skill needs, or for sharing among friends. Groups may be of various sizes and either originated by students or by teachers. Grouping should not represent a tracking or lock-step system. Great harm may be done to self-concept if locked-in grouping is done, because children are easily labeled as "fast" or "slow" learners.

Many teachers like to limit the amount of oral reading in group situations, using group time for skill development, sharing, and game activities. Children learn to do silent reading independently and reserve oral reading for individual conferences. Many worthwhile and exciting ways to enhance oral reading, listening, and speaking skills exist in group situations. Some of these include: oral prose reading, poetry, drama, reader's theatre, and read along experiences. However,

the practice of "taking turns" to read orally each page of every reading lesson should be avoided. This procedure encourages boredom for most students, embarrassment for slow students, and wastefulness of reading time. "Only one child is able to read at a time while the other students are left to watch, perhaps listening or perhaps daydreaming." (France, 1980)

Grouping Summary:

Two features of group instruction should be diversity and flexibility. Different kinds of groups can be formed so that a student does not have to be bound within one single group for too long a period of time. A group should be organized to serve a singular purpose. It should be formed as the need for it arises. There are many kinds of grouping procedures.

Achievement Grouping - As many texts are designed for approximate reading grade ranges, students may be assigned to groups in which material will most closely match reading achievement as determined by assessment activities.

Skills Grouping (or Special Needs) - A few students who need development of the same skill may be grouped together for instruction. The group would last only as long as the time needed to learn the skill.

Interest Grouping - Students sharing the same interests may be placed together to further research the subject. Another form of interest grouping is a gathering of students of various interests who would teach and learn from each other.

Social Grouping - Students of similar backgrounds may be grouped temporarily to study a topic. For example, one group of girls and one group

of boys may be formed to prepare a debate on the Equal Rights Amendment. Students of a variety of backgrounds may be grouped for a single purpose as well. For example, students of various ethnic cultures may work together to present poems about and/or by minorities in a program for the class.

Tutorial Grouping - A student able to perform and able to explain a skills area may be paired with a student who needs individual practice in that area. Both tutor and the student should be willing participants if this kind of group is to be mutually successful.

Materials, Test Selection, Readability

Standardized tests, an effective beginning for needs assessment, lead to materials and test selection and help determine readability. The following principals by Walter Hill (1974) may serve as guides for establishing and conducting a testing program in reading:

1. Reflect general and specific objectives of the reading program.
2. Be a planned, sequential, and continuous program.
3. Become the focus of the instructional program.
4. Reflect combined efforts of all school personnel - classroom, specialized, and administrative.
5. Utilize various procedures for measuring and observing reading performance.
6. Stress data that can be used effectively for instruction.
7. Have as its main objective improvement of student performance.

Once a teacher ascertains that a number of students have not acquired certain skills or concepts (but students have developed readiness to learn

them), selections of materials and activities designed to produce the desired results must be made. These materials must take into consideration student learning styles so that learning will not be sacrificed for structure.

Teachers can measure reading levels of textbooks and supplementary readers available. Knowing reading levels and interest of students themselves, as well as knowing various levels and topics contained in materials, teachers can be better prepared to meet needs of students. They can predict which students will succeed in which materials; and prevent some students from failure by assigning them to materials closer to individual interest levels.

General Assessment of Materials - Teachers can evaluate classroom and school library materials by a general survey of questions:

1. Do materials cover a wide range of interests? Are there books providing information, interest, recreation, and reference?
2. Are there materials of various media? Are books, magazines, newspapers, filmstrips, records, cassettes, and films presented to students?
3. Are workbooks or worksheets available for supplementary instruction of reading skills?
4. Is a basal reader series used or is one textbook assigned to a content-area class? If "yes," the book can be generally evaluated with these questions:
    a. Does the size of the book itself have any subtle phychological effect: Does it appear "formidable" or "too childish" for the group of students.

b. What are the size and type of print?

c. Is there adequate spacing between lines?

d. Is the syntax easy or difficult to follow? Are sentences simple or complex, short or long, etc.?

e. Are words and unusual concepts explained in footnotes or in the glossary?

f. Is the book organized for practical use? What format is followed?

g. Are illustrations and photographs effectively included? Does the cover of the book stimulate interest?

With student learning styles as guides, amounts and kinds of reading material which could be used is limitless. Materials from all areas of the curriculum should be available: library books, magazines, pamphlets, group experience charts, student produced materials, newspapers, commercial materials devoted to specific interest areas (C.B. radio material, motorcycle and automobile repair manuals, cookbooks, patterns, etc.) and textbooks. Among books available, some of the following areas should be included: picture books, folk and/or fairy tales, humor stories, adventure stories, animal stories, poetry, classics, biography, real world events, sports, mystery, facts and how-to books, and science topics.

Children need planned guidance in selecting reading. By means of readability formulas (such as those devised by Fry or Lorge) teachers can identify appropriate independent and instructional levels for children. Some children may need close guidance in selecting materials; some need assistance over a long period of time. Techniques in selection can be

developed with the entire class, a small group, or through individual conferences.

Auditory discrimination tests may be used to determine children's ability to hear accurately. Test results are useful in identification of early elementary readers who seem slower than peers in developing auditory discrimination. Close correlation of all language arts skills indicate the importance of auditory discrimination in reading ability (Greene and Petty, 1975).

Balance, Methodology and Approaches

In selecting methods and approaches for teaching reading, balance becomes a most important consideration. The many and various methods available to teachers can be considered in light of individual student needs. Slower children, or those experiencing difficulty in reading, may benefit most from a language experience approach. Language-experience in reading values the language of each child, faulty as it may be, as a beginning point for further development. It puts the thinking of each child at the heart of the learning process.

Through language-experience, communication skills (listening, speaking, writing, reading) are placed at the core of the curriculum. Elementary level activities depend on students dictating words, sentences, and eventually short stories of first-hand experiences to the teacher. When recorded these become initial reading lessons. Language-experience requires abundant use of self-expression with many art media and multi-sensory experiences, such as music and physical activities. In all levels, language-experience utilizes the content of science, social studies, and mathematics.

Basal reading programs are often very appropriate for average or grade level achievers. Gifted or high achievers often profit by an individualized approach that utilizes many kinds of materials, such as library books, current events, reading kits, and diversified student selected materials.

In addition to a balance of approaches for a given classroom, balance should also be a consideration when selecting methods and learning activities. Again, plans for a wide variety of activities and methods that allow for many kinds of activities (sustained silent reading, tape-assisted reading, reader's theatre, reading marathons, write-tell-read-stories, dyad oral reading games, sharing time, direct experience with teacher, opportunity for a planned sequence of reading skills, and evaluation) are necessary for a good reading program. Variety serves to maintain interest. Children are motivated easier and, just as they learn better, they retain what is learned longer when they are highly interested.

A balanced program which provides high interest and motivation can be scheduled to include activities on both a daily and weekly basis. Daily activities will include silent reading (major program emphasis), oral language experience, skill development, student evaluation, and direct teacher instruction. Weekly activities may include listening activities, small group activities, language study, vocabulary building, sharing time, literature appreciation, and a writing activity. Writing should not necessarily be a part of each day's reading lesson.

Personalized Reading Approach

Long range goals of individual instruction are self-seeking, self-selecting, and self-pacing. General characteristics of the method are: an abundance of books in the classroom, the teacher-pupil (individual) conference, incentive on the part of the student to select materials of personal choice, and student responsibility in the development of reading skills. As with any instructional method, there are many advantages and disadvantages to individualized reading. Research suggests that the more able readers make satisfactory progress in individualized systems. Some authorities assert that certain types of students benefit more in structure, group-oriented methods. The culturally disadvantaged, the slow-learner, and the student low in verbal capacity are the kinds of pupils who usually show more achievement in small group instruction.

A successful personalized reading approach usually includes: a good record keeping system, individual conferences between teacher and student, an effective management system, and opportunity for self-seeking, self-selection, and self-pacing. A skillful teacher plans for these things as a part of the total reading program.

Record Keeping - Vital to individualized reading, record keeping becomes an initial step for which teachers must plan. It must involve cooperation of students and requires mutual consistency on a daily basis. Many activities and reading assignments are done independently and individually. Most importantly, teachers must be aware of individual student progress; therefore, record keeping must be done. With each conference the teacher records precisely the progress of the individual. From these

recordings plans for the next group session, center activity, or individual activity will be planned. Students enjoy keeping their own records and can develop expertise with this process. A few suggested student forms to be used by students for this purpose are given:

Suggestion 1.

NAME _____

DATE _____

NAME OF BOOK _____

I READ ALL THE BOOK _____

I READ ONLY PART OF THE BOOK FROM PAGE ____ TO PAGE ____

I LIKED THE BOOK _____

WHY DID I LIKE IT? _____

WHY DID I NOT LIKE IT _____

Suggestion 2.

MY READING RECORD

NAME _____

DATE _____

BOOK _____

My favorite character was _____.

I didn't like _____.

The funny thing that happened in the story was _____

_____.

The most interesting thing that happened was _____

_____.

Suggestion 3.

MY READING RECORD			
Title	Author	Date	Opinion
Geology	M.V. DeVault	Sept. 16	An interesting book about the earth.

Individual Conferences - Time and place, motivation, evaluation, diagnosis, assessment, and encouragement determine conferences. Teachers often enjoy working with each student daily for the first few weeks of a term. After becoming acquainted, daily sessions may be substituted for about three per week. Working with individuals allows teachers to determine skill development needs, vocabulary needs, comprehension problems, individual interests, and visual problems. At the completion of these conferences, teachers can study records which indicate individual progress and begin to determine needs of each student and, also, begin to decide on meaningful ability grouping classes. These ability group classes would normally continue for three to five days, before reassessment takes place and new groups are formed to take care of more current needs.

Management - Success in the reading program will be elusive without management. Managing a reading program is an important aspect of that success. Good productive room organizations don't just happen, they are planned. Time of day, amount of time, physical arrangement of areas, individual learning stations, group learning stations, and teacher centers

all become vital to a productive operation. The technique of using informative labels, directions, and instructions (clearly written and spoken) can be helpful toward making a room operate smoothly.

Using a chime or classroom bell is useful when teachers wish to get the attention of the entire class. Because of the nature of individualized programs where some students are working in groups; some, independent; and some, with the teacher, a chime or bell often become necessary when attention is needed from the total group.

A large supply of reading materials (library books, texts, newspapers, etc.), effective centers, audio-visual equipment, and creative work areas are ways of setting the stage for a good reading program. A further key to good management lies in teaching children to be responsible for housekeeping chores. Each student should learn to return material used and leave things in order for the next person.

Seeking, Selecting, Pacing - Getting students involved to the point of assuming responsibility for their own reading program is the objective of any reading program. Through teacher guidance children learn steps toward self-motivation. Listening and speaking activities become useful in helping develop appreciation for good literature. Providing opportunities for children to listen to commercial records and tape recordings (by skilled readers) serve to help students learn selectivity and descrimination of reading. Children are motivated by record charts, contests, sharing time, and time to browse and select. Planning a sharing time that includes parents may prove to motivate children. Such an activity

could take place one day a week or, perhaps, one day a month. A major emphasis in self-seeking, self-selection, and self-pacing is motivation. Interest demonstrated by parent participation is often very motivating for children.

An objective in teaching reading is that students will be able to read for information and for delight on their own time as well as during class time. The teacher may thus be concerned with promoting interests in reading in order to fulfill the student's personal and social needs for literacy. A number of activities listed below can be incorporated into classroom instruction to develop literary skills and enhance the learning of the content.

Setting Motivational Goals - Students should realize long-term goals of learning. Teachers may explain rationale for courses by clearly stating goals and stressing independence to be gained by development in various skill areas of linguistic expression:

1. Reading - to become an independent reader so that the student can read and understand anything selected.
2. Writing - to become an independent writer in order to write anything and be understood by others.
3. Listening - to become an independent listener and able to understand words spoken about oneself or others.
4. Speaking - to become an independent speaker in order to share ideas with people and be understood.
5. Thinking - to become an independent thinker necessary for doing one's own thinking.

Emphasizing Readiness - Teachers can emphasize readiness for readers of all levels. That is, they can motivate students' reading by previewing the material to be read. Students can be guided to search for general meanings and specific details. New vocabulary and unique concepts can be taught in preparation for reading. Students' personal attitudes toward assignments can be bolstered by discussion of "benefits" gained in understanding selections; what general information students can acquire in comprehending selections, ideas that they can apply in practical uses, or the enjoyment, surprise, or shock they will feel. In other words, students should be encouraged to read for cognitive, effective, or pleasurable reasons.

Testing, scoring, and grading can play an important part in motivating students to achieve. Students do learn through error correction and are motivated toward greater success when praised for current achievements. They should be encouraged to strive toward fulfilling their own potential rather than competing against peers; students should compare achievement with self-potential rather than with the achievements of others.

Conclusion

Development and implementation of an individualized reading program (often viewed as an impossible task) can be initiated by following the five suggested steps: diagnosis, grouping, materials, balance, and personalized reading. Teachers experienced in individualizing reading instruction will begin to develop teaching models which meet their own individual teaching styles. Effectively implemented, individualized reading can mean the difference in success or failure.

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